



## Public Affairs Support Annex

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### *I. Introduction*

#### **A. Purpose**

This annex provides guidance on carrying out the public affairs function in support of the Federal Government's response to a major disaster or emergency.

#### **B. Scope**

The mission of public affairs is to contribute to the well-being of the community following a disaster by disseminating accurate, consistent, timely, and easy-to-understand information. Specific objectives are to:

1. Instill confidence that government will conduct response and recovery operations quickly, effectively, and efficiently;
2. Provide critical information about how to apply for assistance and the location and status of life-sustaining shelters and resources; and
3. Provide authoritative information to deal with unsubstantiated rumors.

### *II. Policies*

- A. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is responsible for implementing Federal public affairs activities after a major disaster or emergency. DHS will develop strategic plans and policies, provide liaison with the directors of public affairs for other Federal agencies and the White House press office, and determine the need for a Joint Information Center (JIC).
- B. In a major disaster or emergency, a JIC will be established as a central point for coordination of emergency public information, public affairs activities, and media access to information about the latest developments. The JIC is a physical location where Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) from involved agencies come together to ensure the coordination and release of accurate and consistent information that is disseminated quickly to the media and the public.
  1. A JIC may be established at DHS Headquarters (HQ) and/or near the scene of the disaster. Release of information between the two will be well coordinated to the maximum extent possible.
  2. Only one primary Federal JIC will be in a major disaster area, preferably collocated with the Disaster Field Office (DFO), either in the same structure or an adjacent

structure. This close proximity is designed to facilitate the JIC's access to sources of information about the disaster operation and enable leadership access to the JIC.

3. HQ and on-scene JICs may be established through the execution of other Federal emergency operations plans or under special procedures.
- C. Before its release, Federal, State, and local disaster information will be coordinated to the maximum extent possible to ensure consistency and accuracy.
- D. All Federal agencies may use their own mechanisms for releasing information. No editorial or policy control is exercised by the coordinating PAO over other agencies' release of information about their own policies, procedures, or programs.
- E. State and local governments, as well as voluntary and private responding organizations, are encouraged to participate in and share the resources of the JIC. If collocating at the JIC is not feasible, all organizations are encouraged to conduct their information activities in cooperation with the JIC.

### **III. *Situation***

- A. After a major disaster, normal means of communications in the affected area may be destroyed or severely disrupted; therefore, only limited and incomplete information may be expected from the area until communications can be restored.
- B. The period immediately following a major disaster is critical in setting up the large and complex mechanism that will be needed to respond to the emergency public information and news requirements generated by the disaster.

### **IV. *Concept of Operations***

#### **A. Organization**

The primary organizational elements of a JIC may vary depending on the size of the disaster and the location of the JIC (HQ or on scene). Generally, these elements include:

1. The chief spokesperson for DHS in an HQ JIC is the DHS Director of Media Affairs, or a designee, who fields inquiries from national news media. The chief spokesperson in an on-scene JIC is the lead PAO, who may be operating from a Regional Operations Center (ROC) until a JIC is set up in the disaster area. The lead PAO will consult the DHS Director of Media Affairs to ensure a smooth transition to field operations;
2. Media Relations serves as the primary point of contact (POC) for the media for information regarding all disaster response, recovery, and mitigation programs provided by DHS, the State, and other Federal, State, local, and voluntary agencies. This includes providing the media accurate and timely information on disaster operations, working with members of the media to encourage accurate and constructive news coverage, monitoring media coverage to ensure critical messages are being

reported, and identifying potential issues or problems that could have an impact on public confidence in the response and recovery effort;

3. Creative Services gathers information about response, recovery, and mitigation operations and develops and produces information for dissemination by the JIC to the print and broadcast media;
4. Multilingual Operations ensures non-English-speaking populations receive accurate and timely information about disaster response, recovery, and mitigation programs through appropriate media and in their languages to the extent possible; and
5. Special Projects plans and executes projects such as print and broadcast media public service campaigns, video documentation, surveys, special productions, and logistical support of public meetings and presentations.

## **B. Headquarters-Level Response Structure**

1. The DHS Director of Media Affairs will:
  - a. Serve as the White House liaison for all media activities in major disasters and emergencies;
  - b. Coordinate public affairs policy, planning, and operations for disaster response in consultation with other agency public affairs directors;
  - c. Represent DHS on an HQ interagency group, comprised of the senior public affairs representatives from each JIC member agency, which comes together periodically to help guide the policies of the JIC and coordinate significant JIC activities; and
  - d. Manage overall HQ JIC operations and activities.
2. Federal information released after a disaster is coordinated by and disseminated from HQ offices through the establishment of a JIC in Washington, DC, in consultation with the RST media affairs team, until an on-scene JIC is operational in the disaster area. Depending on space requirements and availability, the HQ JIC will be located at DHS, with backup locations available at nearby agencies.
3. Once the on-scene JIC is operational, it will assume primary responsibility for originating and coordinating Federal information released to the media and the public. The HQ JIC will continue to operate as long as necessary as a satellite of the on-scene JIC, and will provide information services to media in the Washington, DC, area.
4. DHS HQ will provide centralized services to support the JIC in the field. These services include production of the Recovery Times newsletter and daily updates for the media, DHS Radio Network, national media monitoring and analysis, JIC reports, Internet services, and nationwide broadcast fax.

## C. Regional-Level Response Structure

1. The on-scene lead PAO serves as the primary POC in the field, handling public information responsibilities in support of the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO). The lead PAO also oversees hour-to-hour JIC operations (in a particularly large-scale disaster, a JIC Coordinator may assume responsibility for JIC operations).
2. The on-scene JIC should be located where members of the news media are likely to gather. If the DFO is at a remote site, a fully staffed satellite JIC should be established to work with the on-site media. Authority to release public information will remain at the primary JIC.
3. The primary functions of the on-scene JIC are to:
  - a. Provide response and recovery information to individuals, families, and businesses and industries directly or indirectly affected by the disaster;
  - b. Monitor news coverage to ensure accurate information is being disseminated;
  - c. Take action to correct misunderstandings, misinformation, and incorrect information concerning the disaster response, recovery, and mitigation operations that appear in the news media;
  - d. Ensure non-English-speaking populations receive accurate and timely information about disaster response, recovery, and mitigation operations through appropriate news media and, to the extent possible, in their languages;
  - e. Use a broad range of resources to disseminate information to disaster victims and the general public, including the Recovery Times newsletter, DHS Radio Network, DHS Recovery Radio, Recovery Channel, broadcast fax, and the Internet, as well as traditional print and broadcast news media;
  - f. Maintain contact with and gather information from Federal, State, local, and voluntary organizations taking part in disaster response operations;
  - g. Handle appropriate special projects such as news conferences and press operations for disaster area tours by DHS officials and others;
  - h. Provide public affairs support and advice to the FCO and FCO staff; and
  - i. Coordinate with the Logistics Section to provide basic facilities, such as communications, office space, and supplies, to assist the news media in disseminating information to the public. (These facilities are provided as long as the FCO determines their provision to be in the public interest.)

## ***V. Response Actions***

### **A. Initial Actions**

On notification that a major disaster or emergency has occurred, the Director of Media Affairs at DHS HQ will:

1. Contact counterparts at other Federal agencies to determine whether there is to be unilateral response to news media or a coordinated response, with one agency serving to articulate the Federal response;
2. Determine the need for a JIC after consulting other Federal agencies;
3. Contact the regional PAO of the affected area (or other regional official; or, failing to reach the region, contact the State PAO), to relay information on Federal interagency plans; and
4. Coordinate with the FCO and the Emergency Support Team in assigning a lead PAO to deploy to the disaster site and assume public information responsibilities at the JIC.

### **B. Continuing Actions**

1. The Director of Media Affairs will:
  - a. Provide advice and support to the Catastrophic Disaster Response Group and keep it apprised of all public affairs actions;
  - b. Serve as the focal point for all incoming information from the on-scene lead PAO and JIC; and
  - c. Ensure JIC procedures in the DHS Emergency Information Field Guide are put into action.
2. The lead PAO will:
  - a. Assume the on-scene lead PAO role on arrival at the disaster area. At that time the DHS regional PAO will assume a key management position (either deputy or special assistant, as specified by the Public Affairs Emergency Response Team roster). A JIC Coordinator may assume responsibility for the hour-to-hour operations of the JIC;
  - b. Represent the FCO (or FCO's deputy) with the media, public, and other agencies; and
  - c. Serve as an advisor to the FCO and implement public affairs policies and procedures as established by the Director of Media Affairs.
3. Each person representing a JIC member organization will function in two capacities:
  - a. Represent the agency in carrying out its public affairs mission; and
  - b. Provide public affairs services in support of the various JIC missions.